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**Fifth Committee**

**Summary record of the 24th meeting**
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 11 November 1998, at 10 a.m.

*Chairman*: Mr. Abelian ..... (Armenia)
*Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions*: Mr. Mselle

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*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

**Agenda item 119: Human resources management** (*continued*) (A/52/814; A/53/266, A/53/327, A/53/342, A/53/375 and Corr.1 and 2, A/53/385, A/53/414, A/53/501, A/53/502, A/53/526, A/53/548, A/C.5/52/2; A/C.5/53/L.3)

1. **Mr. Zacklin** (Assistant Secretary-General for Legal Affairs), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on respect for the privileges and immunities of officials of the United Nations and the specialized agencies and related organizations (A/53/501), said that the report had been prepared in response to three distinct resolutions of the General Assembly and dealt with the conditions in which staff members carried out their functions.

2. The question of the security and safety of personnel was dealt with in paragraphs 5 to 66. Between 1 July 1997 and 30 September 1998, 27 staff members had lost their lives in the performance of their duties, 15 of them in aircraft accidents. The kidnapping and hostage-taking of United Nations personnel also remained a serious problem. In the period under consideration (1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998), there had been eight such incidents, seven of which had been resolved, but Mr. Cochetel, representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in North Ossetia, who had been abducted in January 1998, was still missing.

3. The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) attached the greatest importance to staff security. The decision it had taken on that issue was included in annex I to the report. ACC had endorsed the establishment of a security training programme for all staff members in the field, and at its request a Trust Fund for Security of United Nations system staff had been established. All Member States were urged to contribute to that Fund, to which the Governments of Norway and Japan had already made or pledged contributions.

4. Detailed information on staff members remaining under detention or missing was contained in annex II. As outlined in paragraph 68 of the report, action had been taken by the Government of Ethiopia with regard to United Nations staff members of Eritrean origin, as a result of which approximately 30 of them had had to leave the country. The Secretary-General condemned such practices and pointed out that United Nations staff members were not diplomats and could not be declared *personae non gratae* or expelled without the Organization being given the opportunity to look into each case and decide whether the privileges and immunities of the United Nations had been involved.

5. Paragraphs 72 to 74 of the report dealt with the taxation of officials and restrictions on their travel. Additional details were provided in annex IV.

6. In paragraphs 75 to 84 of his report, the Secretary-General reminded Member States of their obligations and emphasized that, if no action was taken to provide protection for staff members in the field, the Organization might have no option but to withdraw its staff.

7. In conclusion, he invited the members of the Committee to agree on the best ways to strengthen the security and safety of officials and to act efficiently and adopt a single global resolution on the question.

8. **Mr. Gorita** (Romania) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made at the previous meeting by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union on the question of human resources management. He would therefore confine himself to emphasizing certain aspects. Since the Organization devoted 70 per cent of its budget to staff expenditure, the Member States could legitimately expect the staff to demonstrate professional excellence. That was why his delegation supported the Secretary-General's strategy to provide the Organization with the skills it required. But to secure a high level of performance from the staff it was necessary to offer rewarding career prospects. In that connection, his delegation shared the concerns expressed by other delegations regarding the large number of resignations of staff members at the P-2 and P-3 levels. If that trend continued, it could jeopardize the functioning of the Secretariat. One solution to the problem might be to set aside a certain number of P-3 posts for the promotion of P-2 staff members.

9. As for the composition of the Secretariat, concerning which detailed statistics were provided in document A/53/375, it should be noted that one sixth of the Member States were still either unrepresented or under-represented, and that some States, such as Romania, have seen their representation decrease significantly.

10. His delegation remained in favour of the national examinations procedure for the recruitment of entry-level staff, but, as the representative of Japan had emphasized, the process was marred by long delays. Successful candidates should be offered posts much more quickly and, in view of the number of people who were due to retire over the next five years, there should also be increased recruitment to more senior posts, in parallel with the national examinations

procedure. That was the only way to rejuvenate the Organization.

11. **Mr. Dos Santos** (Mozambique) said that his delegation associated itself fully with the statement concerning human resources management made at the preceding meeting on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, but he wished to touch on a few points which were of particular interest to his delegation. Streamlining and simplifying the rules and procedures, including those relating to the recruitment process, would contribute to more efficient human resources management. Decentralization and the delegation of authority would certainly contribute to greater efficiency, provided that lines of responsibility and authority were clearly defined at the various levels of the hierarchy and that the principle of the requirement for accountability was applied.

12. The number of resignations of staff members was astonishingly high. Such a situation, especially at the P-2 and P-3 levels, was indicative of a lack of career prospects. That problem must be addressed urgently if the Organization was to be able to recruit younger staff for the long term, as was its stated policy.

13. In the context of decentralization, the Office of Human Resources Management should continue to play a leadership role in ensuring respect for the principle of equitable geographical distribution and gender balance in the Secretariat, two issues which were of great importance to his delegation. The number of unrepresented, under-represented and overrepresented States had fallen between July 1997 and June 1998; his delegation welcomed that trend, although Mozambique remained in the category of the unrepresented countries.

14. The system of national competitive examinations, which could theoretically help to bring new blood into the Organization, was not functioning satisfactorily. It was a cumbersome and slow system, which only yielded on average 17 successful candidates a year, and it did not in fact address the needs of countries which were already the least represented in the Secretariat. While Mozambique, where a national competitive examination had been held for the first time in 1998, was still in favour of that method of recruitment, it believed that appropriate improvements must be made in order to allow all Member States to put their abilities and expertise at the service of the Organization.

15. **Mr. Hajayandi** (Burundi) stressed that reform of human resources management was a key element in the overall reform of the United Nations since it involved those responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Organization. His delegation welcomed the creation by the Secretary-General of a special team to advise him on priorities and strategies for change in that area. Priority should be given not only to respect for the regulations and administrative rules, but also, and above all, to the strengthening of horizontal and vertical communication within the Organization, and to evaluation and accountability.

16. A new recruitment system must be created which would allow for the rapid processing of cases in a fair and transparent manner, and which would take into account the priorities of geographical and gender balance. If excessive ageing of the Organization was to be avoided, it was essential that the Organization should gradually recruit young, motivated staff members to whom it could offer career prospects and the opportunity for continued professional development. If staff members were to be equal to the task of performing their duties with the dedication and efficiency expected of them, they must be provided with a peaceful and secure working environment and their rights must be respected.

17. Given the role of the International Civil Service Commission in determining working conditions for personnel in the common system, his delegation supported a review of the composition, mandate and functioning of that body. It was, moreover, convinced that reform of human resources management could not succeed without the widest possible participation of all those concerned and believed that the Secretary-General's proposals should lead to systematic consultation between all the partners, including the staff representatives.

**Other matters**

18. **Mr. Acakpo-Satchivi** (Secretary of the Committee) read out a letter addressed to him by the Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services in response to comments made by the delegation of Costa Rica concerning security arrangements for the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. The letter recalled the security measures regulating the movements of diplomatic vehicles within the United Nations, access from First Avenue at 43rd Street being reserved for the vehicles of the Permanent Representative (or Head of Delegation) of each country. Clarification was also provided in information circular ST/IC/1993/50, and in a 1993 booklet for delegations. The complaint registered by the representative of Egypt was being investigated by the Security and Safety Service.

*The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.*